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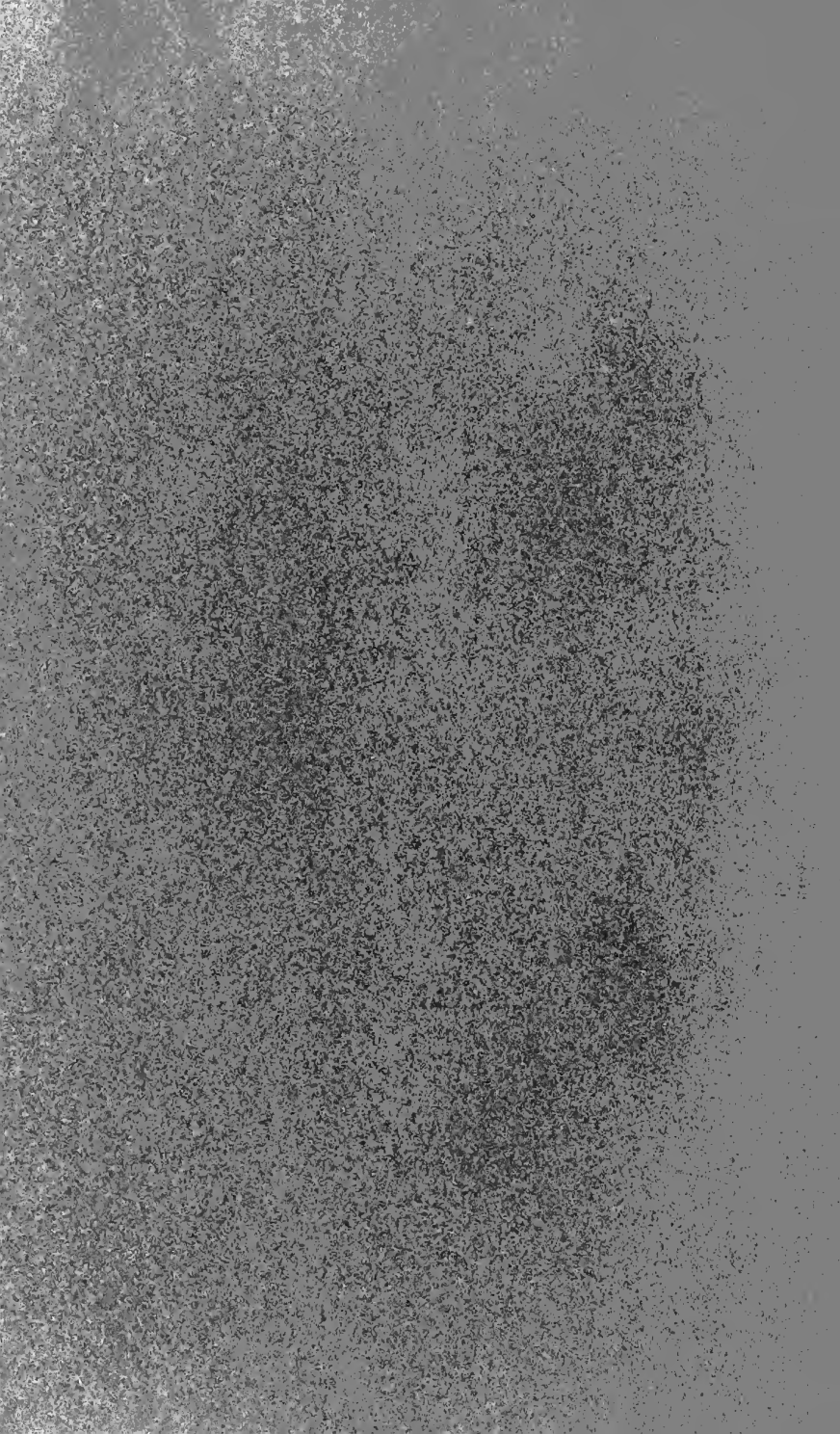


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Czecho-slovakian Foreigners' Office.

Great Britain *and* The Czecho-Slovaks.

By

Vladimir Nosek,

Secretary to the Czecho-slovak Legation in London.

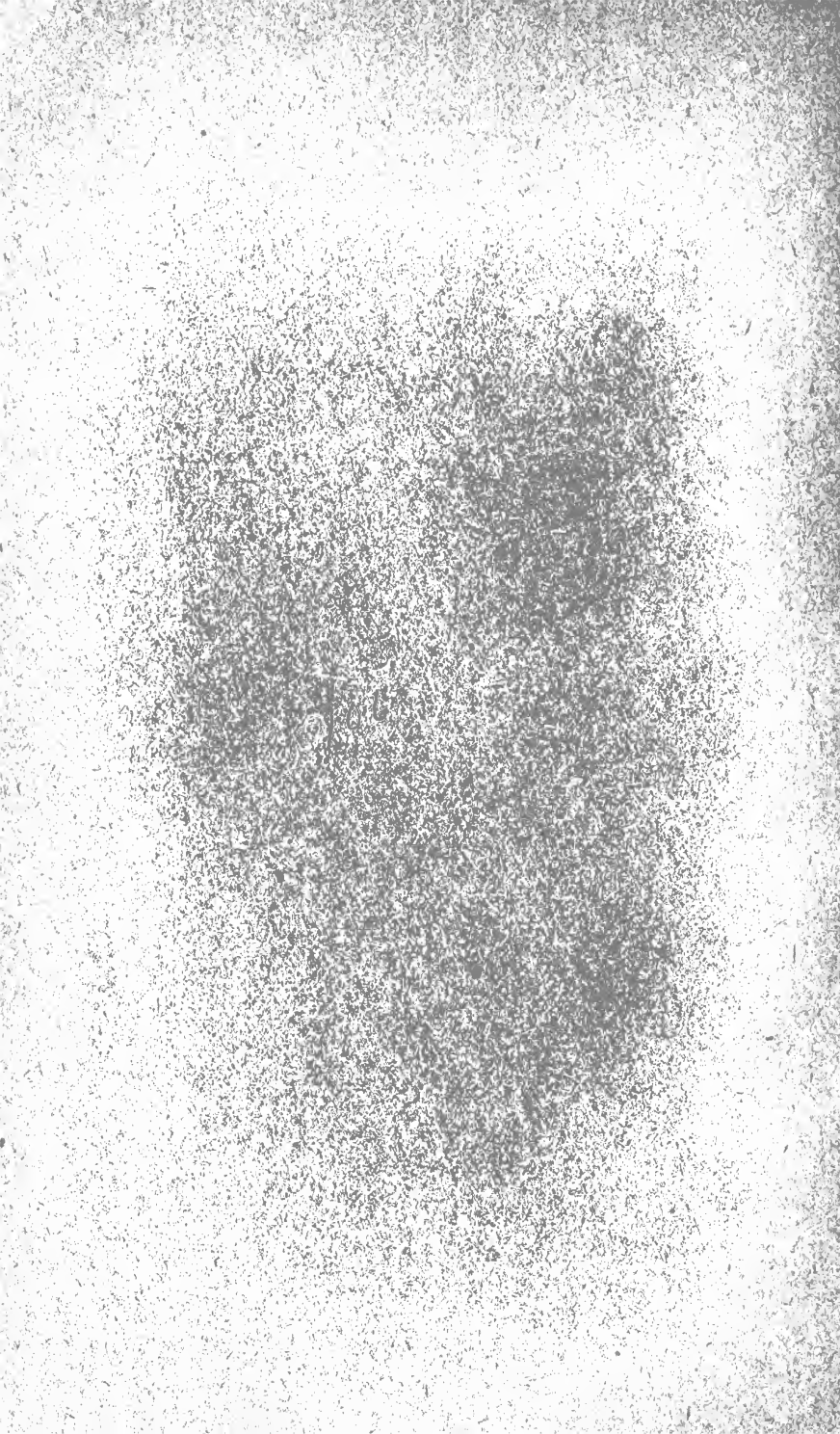


Prague 1919.

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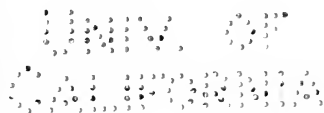


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„Since the beginning of the war the Czecho-Slovak Nation had resisted the common enemy by every means in its power. The Czecho-Slovaks have constituted a considerable Army fighting on three different battle-fields and attempting in Russia and Siberia, to arrest the Germanic invasion.

„In consideration of its efforts to achieve independence *Great Britain regards the Czecho-Slovaks as an Allied nation*, and belligerent Army waging regular warfare against Austria-Hungary and Germany.

„Great Britain also recognizes the right of the Czecho-Slovak National Council, as the supreme organ of the Czecho-Slovak national interests, and as the present trustee of the future Czecho-Slovak Government, to exercise supreme authority over this Allied and belligerent Army.“

*Official British Declaration
of August 9th, 1918.*

24th April 1919.

Great Britain and the Czecho-Slovaks.

1. The historical ties binding Great Britain with Bohemia are not insignificant. It is especially in the intellectual sphere where the influence of Anglo-Saxon civilisation was particularly felt in Bohemia, both during the reformation period of Bohemian history and in the critical period of the first beginnings of Czecho-Slovak regeneration.

The fact that Shakespeare in one of his plays speaks of the sea-coast of Bohemia is wrongly quoted as an example that even in old times the British people knew little about the Czechs. On the contrary it could be proved that the important historical role which the kingdom of Bohemia played in former times, was by no means overlooked in England. The first Bohemian king was so well known that even to-day a carol is sung about him in England: »The Good King Wenceslas«, and the Czechs are mentioned in old English chronicles even as far back as the ninth century.

The friendship between the two countries was greatly strengthened through the marriage of Anne, daughter of one of the greatest

Bohemian kings, Charles IV, with Richard II. Queen Anne justly made herself popular in England through her wisdom and love of literature. It was her grandfather, King John of Luxemburg, who fought and fell as King of Bohemia on the side of the French at Crecy in 1346, with bravery admired even by his adversary King Edward III, who was unable to refrain from tears when learning of his death. His plumes, taken from him by the Black Prince, form the coat of arms of the Prince of Wales.

The dynastic ties between England and Bohemia were not confined to the marriage of Charles' daughter Anne. The wife of the last Bohemian King Frederick of the Palatinate, Elizabeth, was the daughter of James I, but Queen Anne's marriage was of far greater importance, since it gave impulse to mutual relations between the two countries which led to historical events of great significance. It was about this time (end of the fourteenth century) that the writings of John Wycliff began to be studied in Bohemia and stimulated the Bohemian movement for Church reform which resulted in the Hussite wars. There is no doubt that even John Hus himself, though not actually in complete agreement with Wycliff, nevertheless was largely influenced by his writings. The Czech Protestant movement naturally did not pass unnoticed in England, and various criticisms and historical studies, both favourable and unfavourable have been written upon this momentous period in our history, when our nation showed its inner potentiality by becoming the first Protestant nation in Europe.

After the fateful battle of the White Mountain in 1620, England became the refuge of Czech exiles who had to leave their native country, conquered by the Habsburgs. Among these exiles was also the famous painter and engraver Venceslas Hollar who became Master of Designs to King Charles II., and the great paedagogue Komensky (Comenius) who came to England at the express wish of the Long Parliament in 1641. Komensky whose educational and religious views were very advanced for those days, drafted a scheme for the establishment of three Colleges, and the Parliament readily voted the money for them, but the subsequent events in England which culminated in Civil War, prevented the realisation of his scheme, and Komensky had to return. He was a bishop of the church called the Unity of Bohemian Brethren whose spiritual descendants are the Moravian Church.

The influence which in its turn English civilisation has made itself felt in Bohemia a hundred years ago, is not negligible. There is no doubt that while the French humanitarian ideas contributed a great deal towards creating the necessary atmosphere and ideology for the

Czecho-Slovak national revival, English literature, notably the works of Milton and Byron have also played an important part in it. Today the best works in English literature are translated into Czech and read extensively. Needless to say that our that young Republic will have a great deal yet to learn from a country so advanced politically and industrially as England, and if before the war we have been unable to study England so thoroughly as we would have liked, the changes brought about by this war which gave our nation the long cherished liberty, make it imperative for us to solicit British friendship and help so that both the countries should know, understand and trust each other.

II. It is true that before the war the number of our friends in Great Britain who took real interest in the Czecho-Slovaks was very limited. There were those who were interested in the Czech »Sokol« movement, others who knew our football teams, and others again who studied and admired Bohemia from a purely touristic point of view. But the political aspect of the Czecho-Slovak question was really thoroughly studied and understood only by a few, and of them two especially deserve to be mentioned: — Dr. R. W. Seton Watson (Scotus Viator), author of the famous »Racial Problems in Hungary« and Mr. Henry Wickham Steed, formerly the Vienna correspondent of the »Times« and author of the »Habsburg Monarchy«.

The war has of course affected the proverbial indifference of the English public towards international affairs, due to the happy sea-girt position of Great Britain. The Czecho-Slovak question became an international question and public interest became aroused at the courage and endurance displayed by a small nation right in the heart of Europe.

It must not be imagined however, that the scope of the Czecho-slovak question was at once realised in its full bearing by the public, There was many a prejudice to be overcome arising out of the traditional friendship of England with Austria, and there was a great deal of spade-work to be done in the way of pure information owing to the general ignorance about the mere existence of our nation, due chiefly to our own failure to acquaint foreign opinion with the fundamental aspects of our national life, before the war, while the Germans and Magyars have lost no opportunity to advertise themselves and to poison public opinion against us. So strong were the sympathies for Austria in certain circles in England that many politicians believed almost to the very end of the war that our independence was impossible and that Austria could be detached from Germany, to the advantage of the Allies.

On the whole, however, the British Press has, with few exceptions, shown remarkable understanding of our question, and both the daily

press and reviews have readily published our articles and took generally a favourable attitude towards our movement.

The foremost object of our propaganda was, of course, to convince the Allied public of the necessity of the break-up of Austria, if Pan-Germanism was to be beaten and a permanent peace assured. The objections raised against the dismemberment of Austria were either based upon malice and prejudice or upon misconception and ignorance. Strangely enough among the politicians who have shown greater solicitude for the reactionary Austrian Empire than for the freedom of the Slavs were such eminent Liberal and Socialist »authorities«, like Mr. Brailstord and Mr. Noel Buxton, M. P. and their organs the »Herald« and the »Nation«. The arguments used by our opponents were such as could have been manufactured by the Vienna Foreign Office itself: We were described as moonstruck idealists, whose aims were impossible to achieve. The dismemberment of Austria was described as an imperialistic object, even after the collapse of Russia. We were warned that the Allies did not enter the war to liberate us, that it would require thousands of lives on the part of England, and that if the Allies proclaimed the dismemberment of Austria as their object it would prolong the war indefinitely. Furthermore, they expressed doubts as to the real desires of the Czecho-Slovaks at home, and pointed out that the war might be shortened, if the Allies approached Austria with a view of concluding separate peace with her. They alleged that the new Austrian Emperor was anti-German, willing to grant his Slav subjects autonomy and to introduce a new spirit into the policy of Austria. This delusion about the possibility of detaching Austria and of winning the Habsburgs over was so strong in England that even some serious journals, like the »Times« and the »Westminster Gazette« at one time worked under it, while the official circles themselves, although at all times true to the proclaimed principles of self-determination of nations, began to hesitate as to the advisability of insisting in public upon the dismemberment of Austria, and to contemplate the possibility of a new policy with a view of detaching Austria-Hungary from the Central European Alliance.

From the very beginning we fought such prejudice and misconception as existed against us openly and always with the same arguments. We revealed the crimes committed by Austria and Hungary against their own subject Slavs, before and during the war, and we pointed out the fact that Austria was nothing but a tool of Germany, whose aim it was to dominate, with Austria's aid, throughout Central Europe and the Near East. The only way to defeat this plan was to dismember Austria and liberate the Slavs and Latins. It was this international aspect of our question as the crucial

question of Central Europe that enabled our propaganda to achieve such a success as it did. Equally important was also the courageous attitude taken by our countrymen at home who openly defied the Austrian Government and proclaimed their aims to be identical with those of their leaders abroad. Last, but not least, the wholesale voluntary surrenders of our regiments to the Allies and the bravery of our own troops fighting against Austria in Russia, France and Italy, supplied an unanswerable argument against all who entertained any doubt as to our true aspirations. In Great Britain itself all able bodied Czechs volunteered to serve with His Majesty's forces and fought with the British on various battlefields.

The result of our military and political contribution towards Allied victory has been an increased interest and sympathy shown towards us by the public. Today we have many devoted friends in Great Britain in society circles, among members of Parliament, among University professors, scientists, authors, musicians and journalists. We shall never be able to realise quite fully how much we owe to the untiring labours of President Masaryk in this regard, who justly enjoys popularity and general respect in England.

Owing to lack of space we shall be able to refer only briefly to the development of public opinion in England towards our question during the war.

III. As early during the war as December 1914 a book appeared in London called »War and Democracy« (Macmillan & C) in which Mr. Seton Watson already developed the idea of the break-up of Austria and spoke of the revival of the famous mediaeval kingdom of Bohemia, advocating the inclusion of the Slovaks of Hungary in it.

At a lecture delivered at King's College in May 1915, Mr. Seton Watson developed his idea of the »future of Bohemia« and concluded that »there will be room in the new Europe of which we dream for an independent Bohemia, industrious, progressive and peaceful a Bohemia which will have rescued its Slovak kinsmen from the intolerable yoke of Magyar oligarchy.«

The first occasion on which British sympathies with our struggle for freedom were manifested on a larger scale, was the quincentenary of John Hus' martyr death in 1915. Extensive articles on John Hus appeared in all journals as well as an appel of various members of the Oxford University urging Czecho-Slovak independence. The »Times« wrote in a leading article on July 6th. 1915:

»The ties between England and Bohemia are old and honourable. No race in Europe has striven more pertinaciously and successfully than the Czechs to regain

a recognised place amongst civilised peoples. None are more deserving of British sympathy in the cruel position in which this war was placed them; and no result of the war would be more welcome than the re-establishment of Bohemian independence.◀

A meeting was also held on the same day at Aeolian Hall at which several prominent speakers, including Lord Bryce, Mr. A. F. Whyte and Mr. Seton Watson spoke in favour of our independence.

Soon afterwards another event of great importance for the mutual relations between Czecho-Slovaks and Great Britain took place when Thomas G. Masaryk was appointed professor at King's College, London and delivered his inaugural lecture on October 19th, 1915, in which he outlined his political scheme for reorganising Central Europe through the creation of an independent Poland, Bohemia and Greater Serbia. The lecture acquired the character of a political event, as Mr. Asquith, then premier, sent a cordial message to the meeting congratulating King's College upon securing Professor Masaryk's services. The British Press greeted him equally enthusiastically as the promoter of friendship between the Anglo-Saxon and the Slav races.

It is not the purpose of this articles to describe in detail the manifold activities of Professor Masaryk since his arrival in England, yet it is impossible to speak about the ties of friendship between Great Britain and Bohemia without mentioning his name as the chief promoter of this friendship. His world fame as scientist and politician, his strength of personality, frankness, sincerity of conviction, and clearheadedness, not only won for him the affection and respect of numberless friends, but enabled also our cause to be better known and understood. Apart from his lectures at King's College and his diplomatic and political activities as leader of the movement for Czecho-Slovak independence, Professor Masaryk did not miss any opportunity of informing the British public of our aspirations through the medium of the Press. Thus several of his articles appeared in the »Pall Mall Gazette«, »Weekly Despatch«, the »Times« and other journals, and he was also chief collaborator of that splendid English Review of foreign politics, the »New Europe«, when it was first started in the autumn of 1916. About that time also the Czech Press Bureau has been opened by him in Thanet House, Strand, which was working there up to the end of the war, when our Legation has been opened in Grosvenor Place.

The daily Press has been very friendly towards us. »The Pall Mall Gazette«, »Times«, and the »Daily Chronicle« especially have readily published news and statements about Bohemia. Well written

articles from the pen of Professor Pares and Dr. E. J. Dillon have appeared in the »Daily Telegraph«. The »Morning Post« has published pro-Magyar articles, and the liberal »Manchester Guardian« has not always been favourable disposed towards our movement, yet even they gave publicity to our news. Among provincial journals, the »Leeds Mercury«, »Liverpool Courier«, »Scotsman« and »Nottingham Guardian« have also shown lively interest in our movement.

As regards reviews, the „Everyman“ has published for more than a year (1916—1917) articles about us regularly. The „Spectator“, „New Statesman“, „Outlook“ and „New Witness“ also occasionally had articles about us. A very favourable attitude was at all times taken by the „Near East“ and the socialist review „Justice“. Above all, of course, the „New Europe“ has rendered signal service to our cause by publishing well informed articles about our question.

The articles of Canon Barry in the „Nineteenth Century“, of Mr. H. Wickham Steed in the „Edinburgh Review“, of Mr. Seton Watson in the „Contemporary Review“, as well as articles in the „National Review“ and „Round Table“ have also proved of great importance.

Public opinion has naturally fluctuated with the military and political situation. The Allies' Note to President Wilson of January, 1917, proclaiming our independence as one of the Allied war aims, has enormously increased the interest in our question as an international problem. Then again the opening of the Reichsrat in May, 1917, and the courageous speeches of our deputies meant a great moral support to our movement. The heroic deeds of our troops at Zborow during the Kerensky offensive in July, 1917, provided a welcome impetus to our suffering people at home. The declaration of the Czech deputies of January 6th, 1918, and the French decree concerning the formation of our own Army came at the right moment, when the diplomatic situation was very critical and precarious. The former revealed to the whole world the unanimous determination of our nation to obtain independence at all costs, the latter provided a guarantee of our actual sovereignty and a basis for our future diplomatic successes. The Rome Conference of oppressed nationalities in April 1918, met with a hearty response in Great Britain, where the traditions of justice and fair play have always been so keen. The effect of this Conference was only strengthened by the May demonstrations in Prague. But by far the greatest advertisement for us meant the gallant stand of our Army in Siberia, who succeeded, under most difficult circumstances and hardly 100.000 in number, in controlling the whole trans-Siberian railway over 3.000

miles long against all German and bolshevik attacks. Owing no doubt chiefly to these military efforts, Great Britain, first among the Allies, decided to recognise us officially and unreservedly as an Allied and belligerent nation as early as August 8th, 1918, granting at the same time our National Council powers of a *de facto* Government. This was a deed of great generosity and wise statesmanship, and there is no doubt that it contributed more than anything else to the political bankruptcy of Austria. It was a deed which the Czecho-Slovaks will never forget.

IV. Now that the Czecho-Slovaks have at last regained their lost liberty, the task of strengthening mutual friendly relations between our Republic and Great Britain most seriously occupy the minds of all friends of the Slavo-British rapprochement. It is true that we have a great deal yet to learn from the British, from their wonderful spirit of organisation, calm perseverance and long political experience. But no doubt the British people on their part can also profit from a better study of our life and ways. In Bohemia the English will find an opportunity of studying the Slav, both from his weak and strong points, since the Czechs combine the qualities of the dreamy East with those of the practical West. In Bohemia the English could learn the spirit of a small self-sufficient and stubborn nation, forced to live intensively and to fight for its living against more powerful neighbours. They could learn the strength which this nation draws from its idealism, its love of art, music and literature, and they could then better appreciate the positive qualities which the Slav can boast of. For after all, it is only on ground of such mutual understanding that the real brotherhood of nations can be built. The British and Slav character differ from each other, yet it is just because of this difference that they learn from each other.

We can say without exaggeration that every Czecho-Slovak has nothing but the most sincere sympathy and respect for Great Britain, and the British civilisation. English literature is read extensively in Bohemia, English plays from Shakespeare to Bernard Shaw are frequently performed at our theatre in Prague, and our people take keen interest in every British movement or enterprise. There is no doubt that on the other hand British people will manifest their sympathies shown to us during the war also now, by taking greater interest in our literature, art, politics, trade and industries.

A great deal unfortunately remains to be done by us in the way of information. At present there is not even a good grammar for English people to learn Czech. There are historical books about Bohemia, notably Count Lutzow's sketch, and Mr. Paul Selver has

compiled an admirable little anthology of Bohemian poetry, but beyond that very little has been translated from Czech into English. There are one or two descriptive books in English, notably Monroe's „Bohemia and the Czechs“, but a great deal more ought to be published about us in English. From political literature one could recommend Mr. Seton Watson's book on Hungary, as regards the Slovak question. Mr. T. Čapek has published a book in America on „Bohemia under Habsburg Misrule“ and the history of our movement has been outlined in Dr. Beneš' „Bohemia's case for Independence“ and my own „Independent Bohemia“. It is to be hoped, however, that a more detailed account of our remarkable revolution against Austria-Hungary may at a later date be published in English, when we shall be able to judge it from a more retrospective attitude, and when we shall be in possession of all documents and evidence relating to it.

The future relations between Great Britain and the Czecho-Slovak Republic should develop chiefly in the following directions:

a) **Economic relations.** It should be realised in Great Britain that Bohemia is the most important factor in Central Europe from the economic point of view. Bohemia is very rich industrially as well as in mineral wealth and agriculture, even if she has suffered owing to the war, and if her industries have been temporarily suspended owing to lack of raw materials. Before the war Bohemia formed by far the most productive part of the whole Austrian Empire. She produced 929-lbs of grain per inhabitant, while the rest of Austria yielded only 277 -lbs. Bohemia also monopolised almost the whole sugar and beer industry in Austria. Other products exported from Bohemia included the famous Bohemian glass, gloves, hops, paper, coal, iron, textile products, agricultural products and machinery, etc. Altogether it may be safely estimated that the total export from the Czecho-Slovak territory before the war amounted to some forty million pounds annually. On the other hand we used to import from England and the colonies various machinery and metals, cotton and wool, tea, coffee, spices and other colonial products.

In view of the present situation, when our industries are almost entirely suspended owing to lack of raw materials, British capital could with great advantage be utilised in providing such raw materials for the manufacture of textile and other articles, while agriculture in Bohemia could be helped if English live stock, fertilisers and seeds were imported. Incidentally, such step would prove both a sound investment and a sound policy, for it would enable the Czecho-Slovaks to emancipate their trade and industries from the tute-

lage of German capital and it would also strengthen the Republic internally and externally as a bulwark against bolshevism. It is essential that British merchants and financiers should have full confidence in our political stability and not deny us credit. We are an industrious people, full of faith in the future, and if we do ask for the assistance of our Allies, it is only because we wish them to enable us to fulfil the economic and political mission to which we are destined as the most advanced, progressive and democratic people in Central Europe, and as the best and most reliable bulwark against Pan-Germanism and bolshevism.

b) Intellectual relations. For the purpose of a better understanding between the two countries it is essential that a more lively intercourse should be developed between the Prague University and the English Universities. A lecturer in Czech language, history and literature ought to be appointed at least at the London University. Students from Bohemia should visit English Universities more frequently and the same applies also to our young business men and engineers, who ought to come to England to gain experience. Translations from Czech literature ought to be undertaken, while on the other hand we ought to translate into Czech, not only novels but also books on political issues which for us are at present of far greater significance. Almost nothing has been translated into Czech during recent years from the voluminous literature which exists in England on such problems as industrial reconstruction, the league of nations, and other problems arising out of the war, and connected with international relations which occupy the minds of western European political writers of today.

In the same way efficient news service ought to be organised so that both ours and the English press should become emancipated from German influence. Owing to this lack of journalistic organisation, the English press still draws to a considerable extent news from German sources, often without knowing it, while our people also do not obtain sufficient information from abroad, such as they ought to get. These are difficult conditions which no doubt by and by will improve, but which deserve serious attention lest the Germans should again take advantage of us in regard to propaganda.

In this category falls also every kind of enterprise tending to promote a better understanding between the two countries, such as the arrangement of exhibitions, musical and dramatic excursions, municipal visits, and propaganda by means of pamphlets, post cards, films, maps, posters, etc.

A practical expression of sympathy such as Lady Muriel Paget's Relief Mission to Slovakia and the action of the Anglo-Czech Relief

Fund Committee are of course the most eloquent means of strengthening the ties of friendship between the two Allied nations.

c) **Political alliance.** From the political point of view Great Britain ought to pay special attention to the question of strengthening the position of the Czecho-Slovak Republic, and that for the following reasons:

1. The Czecho-Slovak Republic, if accorded proper assistance, will be able to render invaluable assistance to the Allies in the economic resistance against Germany in which our Republic will play the leading part among the other Central European States, owing to its inner economic strength and independence.

2. During the war the Czecho-Slovaks have given proofs of their uncompromising and firm attitude against Austria-Hungary and against the spirit of German imperialism and militarism. The deeds of our Army in Siberia stemmed the spread of bolshevism to the east and arrested the German threat to India and Afghanistan, thereby rendering special service to the British Empire. This was acknowledged by Mr. Lloyd George in his telegram to Prof. Masaryk of September 9 th, 1918, saying that the story of our Army in Siberia »has filled us all with admiration« and assuring him that Great Britain shall never forget it. These facts and the whole Bohemian history warrant the opinion that the Czecho-Slovaks may be considered absolutely reliable from the political point of view, as one of the most pro — Ally peoples of Central Europe.

3. The absolute unity of their movement outside Austria during the war, the harmony in the political action of the Czechs at home and abroad, and finally the perfect order prevailing in our Republic since its very formation, are proofs of the stability of our Republic. The present Czecho-Slovak Government represents all parties, and President Masaryk's authority is generally recognised and respected. Unlike any other State in Central Europe, Czecho-Slovakia has up to now preserved absolute order, without any internal upheavals, revolutions or bloodsheds.

4. The Czecho-Slovak Republic can play an important role as the promoter of an understanding between the various new States in Central Europe, with a view of the formation of a Central European Confederation which would work in conjunction with the Allies. Being friendly both with Poland and the Ruthenes, with Italy and the Yugoslavs, the Czecho-Slovaks can exert their influence in order to bring about an understanding between them. Our Republic will no doubt be able to conclude a close alliance with Poland, Rumania, Yugoslavia and possibly also with Hungary. Such

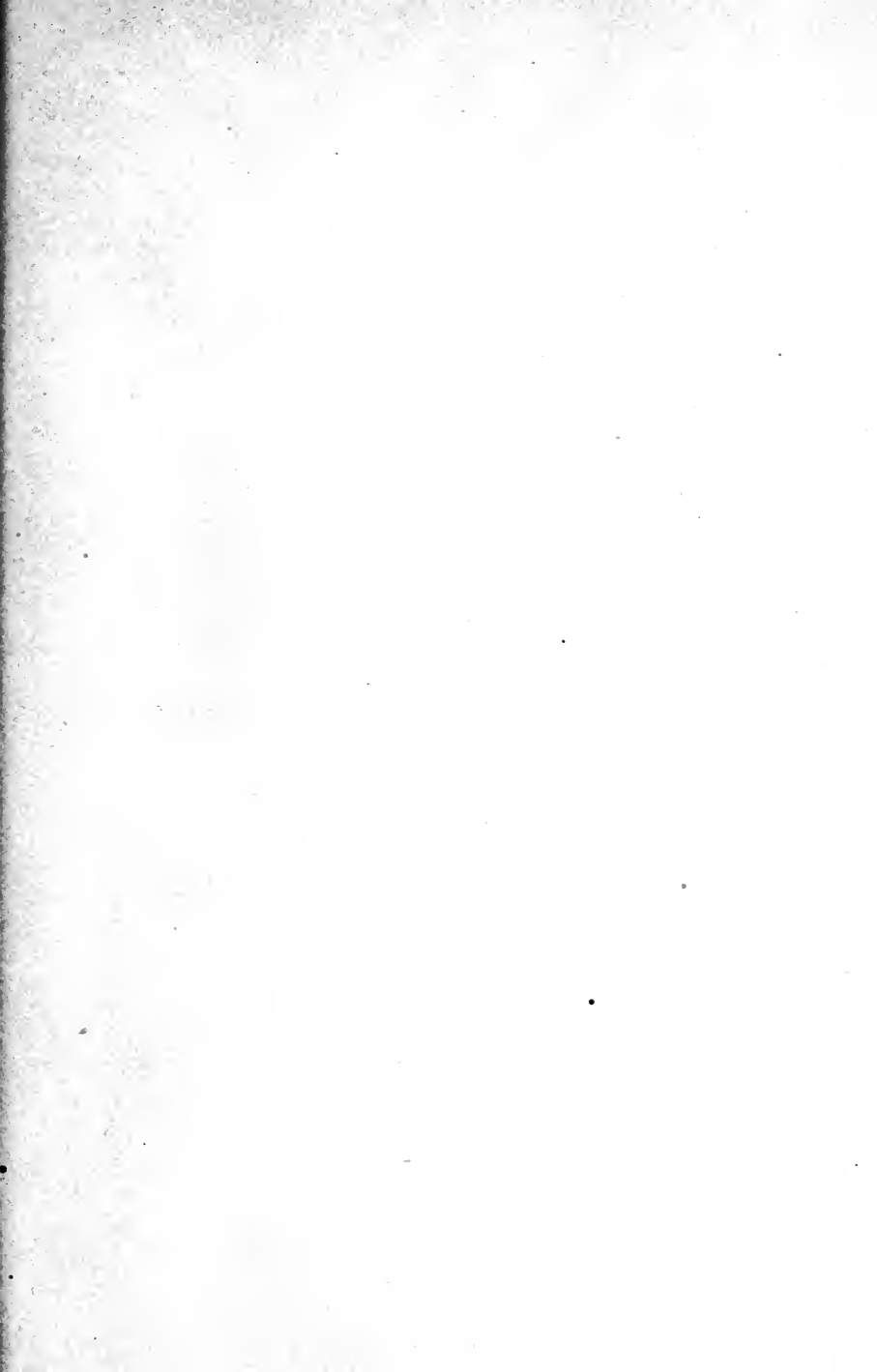
alliance would make any future attempts of the Germans for domination in Central and Eastern Europe impossible.

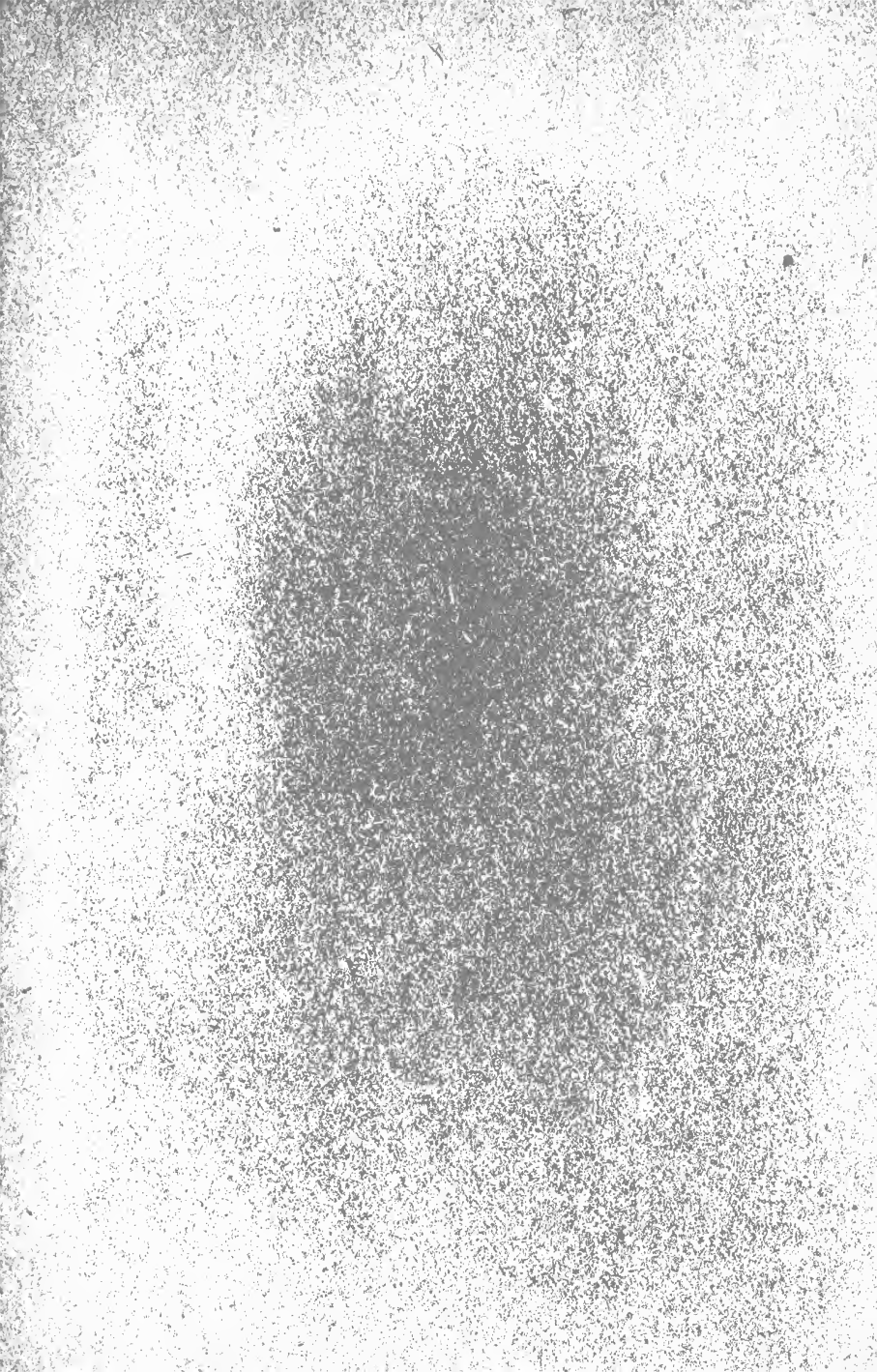
5. If conditions in Czechoslovakia are not allowed to grow desperate, our Republic is destined to play the role of a bulwark against bolshevism. The class differences in Bohemia are not so acute as elsewhere, and titles and large land ownership have been abolished. There are no illiterates except in some parts of Slovakia and there is no bolshevik party, although the Germans and the Magyars are doing their best to corrupt our workers and soldiers by means of insidious propaganda.

It may be truly said that on the fate of Czecho-Slovakia depends the fate of the rest of Europe, including Great Britain. In Bohemia Great Britain has her best friend and most devoted Ally. If Bohemia is allowed to fall, however, then the whole of Central Europe is bound to fall prey to bolshevism, which will soon overcome even Western Europe. The interests of England are inevitably bound up with the fate of Czecho-Slovakia. For this reason the friendship between England and Bohemia is not merely the concern of these two countries. It is a question of international importance. It is a vital question for Great Britain, for us and for the whole of Europe.

London, April 20th, 1919.

Vladimír Nosek.





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